

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

A STUDY OF THE ADEQUACY OF THE PRESENT SYSTEM
OF CLASSIFICATION, PROMOTION, AND
ADJUSTMENT IN THE MACHRAY
JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL,
WINNIPEG

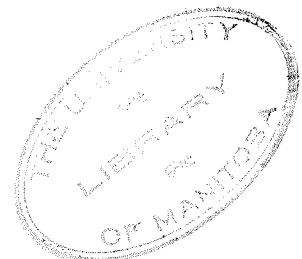
BEING A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE COMMITTEE
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CHAPTER I

STATEMENT OF PLANS AND METHODS OF TREATMENT

Emphasis has shifted from learning of the memoriter type to learning for understanding. Ability to apply techniques and skills have a place but not the first place in the learning of the three R's. These are no longer considered as ends in themselves but as means to the more important objective - understanding to the point where the individual consciously or unconsciously applies them to every day life situations. Furthermore, and but another aspect of the same development, subject matter has been altered and regrouped to render the organization of ideas and understanding possible to varying levels of learning. Naturally, conflicting points of view and considerable confusion have resulted as the process of change has altered aims and procedures.

The whole emphasis in education was formerly on mastery of the 'three R's'. These skills, taught as independent, unrelated drill units, consumed most of the school day. Drill, even in the first grade, was presented in mechanical fashion. The skills were taught with little reference to life interests or pupil needs. They were made difficult to learn by being divorced from children's purposes and maturation requirements. Children were forced to read or do arithmetic before the words or numbers meant anything to them.¹

New data on individual differences have an important effect on curricula, objectives, and methods. Teachers realize

¹Gertrude Howell Hildreth, Learning the Three R's; A Modern Interpretation, ed. by Paul L. Boynton; Minneapolis, Nashville (etc.): Educational Publishers, 1938, p. 1.

that the children in their classes have a range of several years in ability and achievement, and consequently attempt to vary the requirements instead of trying to make all alike. The school must meet the needs of a heterogeneous group of pupils, differing in mental ability, health, interests, background, vocational needs, experiences, and financial resources. The curricula, objectives, and methods have to be individualized to meet the needs and capacities of the learners. Special assistance should be given to the duller child and the course should be enriched for the superior. ¹Gertrude Hildreth lists four ways in which the learning of skills may be individualized:

1. Suitable grouping of children for instruction,
2. Providing a range of materials,
3. Using self-teaching devices with automatic check, exercises, and
4. Through making unit assignments.

Until recently, pupils have been graded largely as a result of written examinations and teachers' estimates. The school marks were entered upon monthly or quarterly report cards and the teachers, pupils, and parents took these marks very seriously. To-day the Elementary Schools of Winnipeg have realized the limitations of written examinations with consequent gradings and are attempting to work out a new scale of values. The Junior High Schools are being affected by this movement. Standardized tests and teachers' opinions are contributing more and more toward attaining a more adequate estimate of the use that a pupil is making of his capacities.

¹ibid, p. 13

The succeeding chapters of this thesis attempt a study of some of these modern trends in education. Learning differences among pupils are considered along with means of estimating them. A study is made of how best to classify for study purposes pupils of varying abilities. What should be done in this regard for the superior child, the non-academic, and the backward child? How should pupils be grouped to best meet these situations? The problem of evaluation is one of utmost importance.

The Machray School, Winnipeg, is making an honest attempt to find solutions to these problems. In June, 1947, the principal and teaching staff undertook an experiment in testing that is having an important effect on the objectives and methods of the school. The experiment is being carried on to discover more adequate means of classifying and grouping pupils so as to meet their needs and help them adjust to their learning environment. The experiment is still in its infancy but appears to be succeeding. The plan meets with the approval of most of the teachers; the pupils are happy in the groups to which they are assigned and are making progress that the teaching staff feels is equal to or better than that made under the former system. No serious complaints have come from the parents and, in fact, many parents have expressed their approval.

The Machray experiment in classification and grouping of pupils at Junior High School level is reported in detail and assessed in the light of present data in Chapters V, VI, VII, and VIII of this thesis. Intervening chapters direct attention to the importance of the problem, to the history of Machray

School, and to its present learning conditions, instructional
and physical.

CHAPTER II

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE MACHRAY JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL DEPARTMENT

Machray School was named after Robert Machray, Archbishop of Rupert's Land and first Primate of Canada. Archbishop Machray was born at Aberdeen, Scotland, in 1831, consecrated at Lambeth in 1865, and came out from England as the second Bishop of Rupert's Land to the Red River Settlement from which in 1870 the Province of Manitoba was created.

There was little provision for education, no public schools, and only a few private schools when the Archbishop arrived at the Red River Settlement in 1865. He was very much interested in education and one of his first acts was to revive the St. John's College, which had been closed for some time. Then he set about to establish schools and soon had one in each parish. The Government took over the schools when the Province of Manitoba was created and placed them under the Board of Education of which the Archbishop was made chairman.

The history of Machray School goes back to 1884 when Mr. Alex Polson and Mr. McKay applied for a school to take care of the children living in the vicinity of Mountain Avenue. Provided there were enough children to make a school necessary, the School Board of Winnipeg District agreed to set up one and supply a teacher. There was an enrollment of thirty pupils when the school was opened in a frame house facing the present

St. John's Park on Main Street between Mountain and St. John's Avenues.¹ The teacher's living quarters were on the second floor above the classroom. The first teacher was Miss Morrison, who did not hesitate to keep a boy in after four to do the chores for her housekeeping. Unlike the modern classroom there were old-fashioned kitchen chairs, on which the pupils sat around tables, six or eight to a table, according to the size of each grade. There were recesses, lunch hour, and closing at four, but a two-months' vacation was unheard of in those days.

St. John's College was located three blocks away from the old site of Machray School. Because most of the pupils of St. John's came from the south-end, they were considered aliens by the boys of Machray School. There was rivalry and often open warfare between them.

Mr. E. L. Drewry made the 24th of May a memorable day for all the children of the north end. For miles around they gathered outside his home to witness a display of fireworks, after which the youngsters enjoyed refreshments.

In 1886, when the enrollment became too large for the small class-room, the School Board bought two lots on Charles Street near Mountain Avenue, on which a one-room frame building was erected. Miss A. Jaffray was the first teacher to take charge of this school.

Untill 1888 this one-room school house was large enough to fill the needs of the district. Then another room was added and a second teacher, Miss A. B. Nichol was engaged. She taught

¹Machray School 1884 - 1943. A Brochure Issued by Machray Re-Union Committee, May 28, 1943, p. 9.

at Machray for three years, during part of which time she was principal. The community and staff were fortunate in the Board's choice of a principal who did much to build up the reputation of Machray School. Miss Nicol, who later became Mrs. Dutton, died at Gilbert Plains, Manitoba, in 1927.

Once again the school became too small and in 1891 two more lots were purchased and another room was added. Miss Margaret Young, who followed Miss Nicol as principal of Machray, held that position for only a very short time when she transferred to the new Aberdeen School where she was principal until 1899. In that year she left the teaching profession and went to the United States where she studied and practiced law very successfully until the time of her death in 1935.

Miss Nettie Milligan, now Mrs. J. R. Crosthwaite of Seattle, Washington, was the next principal. From 1893 to 1899 the control of Machray was in her very capable hands and it became one of the finest schools in the city. She was an excellent teacher, always fair in her dealings with her pupils, and those whom she taught were greatly indebted to her for the very thorough training they received.

This frame, three-room school was adequate for the needs of the community until 1899 when it was sold, moved to Jarvis Avenue, and made into three dwellings. At this time the front portion of the present Machray School, Number I was built - a ten-room, three story building, with an Assembly Hall. Miss Alice Talbot, who later became the wife of Archbishop Matheson, was the first principal. Her picture may be seen hanging in the halls of the school to-day. In 1904 she left Machray to

become the principal of Carlton School.

Mr. J. B. Wallis, who succeeded Miss Talbot as principal, came to Machray School in 1904. The staff at that time consisted of ten teachers, Mr. Wallis teaching Grade VIII.

During the years 1904 - 1907 there occurred two or three important events. The school adopted its present colors - green and gold. The Machray shield with its motto, Duty, Responsibility, Self-Sacrifice, was also chosen. The first Machray School song, later replaced by the present "Courage", was also introduced.

By 1907 the enrollment of Machray had become too large for the ten rooms. There were 963 pupils - 266 in Grade I. Mr. Wallis had fifty-nine Grade VIII pupils in his room. Four teachers presided over the Assembly Hall which was filled with 156 desks. However, the burden was lessened in 1908 when many pupils were transferred to the new Luxton School. In 1913 it was necessary for Mr. Wallis to be absent for seven months owing to ill health, and during that period the addition of twelve rooms was built. Mr. Wallis then became the supervising principal.

After seventeen years of service at Machray, Mr. Wallis was appointed Assistant Superintendent of Schools in 1921. The teaching staff deeply regretted his departure from the school, for he had always been a considerate principal, a wise leader, and a true friend to all.

In 1921 Mr. C. W. Laidlaw came to Machray from the Norquay School where he had been principal for seven years. That year, also, the Machray Junior High School was organized -

the second Junior High School in the City of Winnipeg. A new two-storey, red brick building was erected in the north-west corner of the school grounds. The establishment of Junior High Schools was a new phase in education in Winnipeg. Mr. Laidlaw was enthusiastic in trying out this new experiment and under his capable leadership the Machray staff did much to make it a success.

Unfortunately the new school was not finished by the first of September. The Junior High School opened with classes held in the halls of the old building. It was quite a task for a new principal to carry on the normal routine of the school for two months under such crowded conditions. The enrollment at this time was 1,459, of which number 379 were in the Junior High Department. There were thirty-four teachers on the staff, nine teaching Junior high grades.

From 1921 to 1930 the enrollment increased steadily. At the beginning of the second year there were so many Junior High students that these grades had to be moved to the old building, Machray Number I becoming the home of most of the Elementary grades. Machray School had the largest enrollment of its history in 1929, there being 1,610 pupils and thirty-seven teachers.

In 1929 the name of Machray School was carried to all parts of Canada, for in that year Mr. Laidlaw was elected President of the Canadian Teachers' Federation and in his official capacity went to Quebec City, where the Dominion Convention was held. The Machray teachers felt that the Federation had made a wise choice, and were, as always, very

proud of their principal.

Mr. Laidlaw retired as Principal of Machray School in June, 1939. One afternoon in June the entire student body gathered on the playground to say farewell to their principal, whom they deeply respected. The staff, too, felt the loss of a man who had so capably guided the affairs of Machray School for eighteen years. Mr. Laidlaw was guest of honor at a dinner held in the Fort Garry hotel, after which a reception was held and to it were invited those who had at any time the privilege of calling Mr. Laidlaw "my principal". The reputation of Machray School - always an enviable one - was greatly enhanced by Mr. Laidlaw's years of stewardship.

Mr. A. V. Piggott, formerly principal of the Lord Nelson School, succeeded Mr. Laidlaw. He brought youth and enthusiasm to Machray and upheld the high standards of the school. But once again Machray lost its principal to the School Board Office when Mr. Piggott was appointed Assistant Superintendent in 1944.

The present principal, Mr. J. E. Ridd, had taught history in St. John's High School for sixteen years. In 1941 he was appointed principal of the Riverview School, a position he held for three years. In 1947 Mr. Ridd and his assistant, Miss K. Wilson, started an experiment in grading pupils of Machray according to results of standardized tests in reading. As a result of this experiment the pupils in all grades are now placed in more or less homogeneous ability groups. Thus in Machray School to-day, there is an attempt to provide a suitable study environment for each child that will best meet his individual abilities.

CHAPTER III

THE NATURE OF THE LEARNING PROBLEM IN THE LIGHT OF RECENT STUDIES

Learning Differences Among Pupils

Individuals differ widely in any conceivable trait. According to Jordan¹ there are five causes of these differences: (1) sex (2) race (3) maturity or growth (4) near ancestry or family (5) environment.

In general there are no mental qualities unique to male or female. There are, however, small but important differences in intellectual traits. These differences are probably due to differences in preferences and interests. For example, boys are usually more interested in electricity than are girls, and consequently may excel in a study of the electric motor or generator in a course of physics. While boys and girls, men and women, participate jointly in many types of plays and games, there are still clear-cut differences between the sexes in many play activities.

Race undoubtedly plays a small part, in some cases a considerable part, in producing differences among individuals. Negroes and Indians differ from the White Race in intelligence as measured by standard tests. There do not appear to be any marked differences in individual scores in the various subdivi-

¹A. M. Jordan, Educational Psychology; New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1933, p. 294.

sions of the white stock.¹ Foreign children sometimes experience difficulties when they first attend school. These difficulties, however, are not due to mental differences but rather to environment, for example, the parents may use their native tongue in the home almost exclusively.

Individuals differ among themselves in the rate of growth and in the times of maturity attained. However, there seem to be little connection between these varying rates of physiological changes and intelligence.

Near ancestry or family seem to produce a large share of the differences existing among individuals. This statement may be misleading. It does not mean that heredity is the major influence leading to individual differences. But near ancestry or family strongly influences environment and thus leads to individual differences. The question as to whether inherited endowment or environmental influence has the more potent effect in determining a child's development has been a much debated one.

Environment plays an important part in producing differences among individuals. The present day school has a student body coming from a great variety of cultural backgrounds with a wide range of past experiences. The very rich and the very poor are represented. Some of the pupils come from homes possessing every cultural stimulation. Some pupils have travelled extensively, read widely, and participated in all types of educative activities. Because of this variety, the school must begin with the pupil as he is, and if it is to supplement

¹libid, p. 295

the cultural resources of the home and community, it is obvious that a difficult task is to be undertaken. To be fully effective, the school must have a tremendous range and flexibility of resources so that the educational programme can be more nearly individualized in terms of the experience and backgrounds of all the pupils.

Uncorrected defects of eyes and ears, are found to exist entirely too often. Adenoids and tonsils affect the general attitudes and outlook of children and may be influential in producing a dislike of school subjects. These physical defects prevent the child from forming a clear perception of the material to be learned and lead to individual differences. The school population has been changed by the addition of large numbers of atypical pupils. The dull, the physically defective, the blind, the deaf, the delinquent, and the seriously mal-adjusted, are now coming to school in large numbers for the first time, in an attempt to make the most of their abilities. An increase in society's willingness to provide for these pupils has encouraged them to attend school. Special buildings, curricular activities, and teaching staffs are required.

As a result of these changes in the nature of the school population, the modern school is confronted with the problem of providing for an ever-widening range of pupil interests, abilities, experiences, financial resources, cultural backgrounds, and vocational needs. During this period of rapid change in which adults as well as youth find great difficulty in making satisfactory adjustment, every possible assistance must be given to the youth. The great influx into the schools, the

greater heterogeneity of school population, the greater emphasis on the individual pupil and his particular needs and the resulting broadening and enrichment of the curriculum have all increased the need for pupil guidance.

Equality of opportunity does not mean imposition of the same conditions of development of all individuals. It means providing such developmental conditions that each pupil will have an equal opportunity with all others to make the most of his abilities.¹

The growth of an individual is far more important than any examination or subject matter. The teacher must constantly keep before him the fact that he is teaching children and not history or science. He must aim at developing a better adjusted individual. It is not as important to teach enough history for a child to pass his examinations as it is to build a sense of security within the child. The individual needs of the pupil must be met. There is not equality of educational opportunity when you give the same type of curriculum to all pupils. The school cannot shirk some measure of responsibility for the different natures and tendencies of the various pupils. Developments within the pupils that were vital have been ignored in the past. Today the problem case can no longer be thrown out of school. These cases are in the field of guidance and must be approached intelligently. Guidance may be defined as the discovery of the individual and adjusting the general programme, or the physical conditions or social conditions, to meet the needs of the individual. It is a methodology by means of which a student's interests and individualization may be

¹Frederick S. Breed, Ph. d., Classroom Organization and Management; Yonkers on Hudson, New York: World Book Co., 1933, p. 82.